

have been filed with very substantial cost savings. We thank you for understanding our most critical court needs in the area of technology.

"In terms of case management and backlog, our courts are doing reasonably well in light of the continued, substantial increase in cases and petitions filed at all levels each day. I am pleased to report that at the end of the year 2000, the Supreme Court was current and today is able to set cases for oral argument without delay. Our Court of Appeals judges continue to work exceptionally hard, and they produce an incredible number of well-written opinions. Last year, 1592 appeals were filed with that court, and notwithstanding the election, the court disposed of 98% of them by written opinion. The Court of Appeals judges welcome the three new judgeships which you created last year. Our 105 Superior Court Judges across the State disposed of 285,408 cases last year, approximately 96% of the cases filed, and our 235 District Court Judges, incredibly, disposed of nearly 2.5 million cases, or 98% of the total cases filed.

"As you can see from these numbers, our trial judges, these 340 public servants, who like you are elected by our people, are doing a tremendous amount of work, and they are doing it exceptionally well. However, they are no longer able to keep pace with the incoming surge of people seeking help from our courts. In this regard, I would like to recall the words of former Chief Justice Burley Mitchell in his 1999 address to you, and I quote: 'Our trial courts are struggling but holding their own. They will not be able to do so much longer without help.'

"These words were prophetic, as was the report of the internationally respected Gartner Group, which warned of severe, pending problems due to lack of technology in our courthouses across the State. Your initial funding has already been used to begin a number of urgently needed and cost-effective programs. Now I emphasize 'to begin' because without additional or at least continuation funding, these programs will falter and fail, and the investment made to date in these programs will be lost.

"These programs include: Courtflow and Casewise computer systems enabling much more efficient management of cases; an Automated Judgment Abstracting System; and a Set-Off Debt Collection Program, which last year collected more than 2 million dollars for future indigent defendant representation by tracking the tax returns of former defendants still owing the State money.

"This is good news and a good beginning, but let me again recall the words of former Chief Justice Mitchell in his message two years ago. He stated: 'Many elements of the existing equipment, software and

March 26, 2001